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**USS LIBERTY ALLIANCE & USS LIBERTY VETERANS
ASSOCIATION
DOCUMENT CENTER
PRELUDE & DEDICATION
BY
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This Document Center is opened in 2013, forty six years after the attack upon the United States Ship LIBERTY. The Document Center has been formed by the Board of Directors of the USS LIBERTY Alliance and the Board of Directors of the USS LIBERTY Veterans Association to permit future scholars and other interested parties to read, examine, and analyze a set of important documents that have never been published in the public media until now. These documents offer unique perspectives on the events leading up to the attack on LIBERTY, the attack itself, the aftermath, and the continuing issues associated with interpreting the events of June 1967. These documents will permit scholars to have additional insights into events that have helped shape not just the post 1967 Middle East but also the shape and dimensions of US policy and strategy in the region. The consequences of the June War run much deeper than the apparent outcomes and shaped many aspects of the both the Cold War and the post Cold War eras. The

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deeper consequences live with us today and will continue so for the foreseeable future.

The Document Center honors the memory of those who perished onboard the USS LIBERTY, those who were injured, those who have subsequently passed on, and those survivors who are still alive. The crew of the USS LIBERTY stands as a benchmark of courage, fortitude and indomitable endurance in the face of overwhelming odds.

As one of the most decorated warships in the history of the United States Navy this Document Center is dedicated to their enduring memory.

BACKGROUND TO THE 1967 JUNE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The issues and causes associated with the 1967 June War in the Middle East and the attack on USS LIBERTY are very much relevant and dynamic today for the United States as a whole and the US Navy in particular. Why is this? Fundamentally it is about the truth, and ensuring that the record is set straight. It is about honoring the memory of those who gave their lives for the United States, and in so doing we have to go through the process of analyzing in fine detail all the events surrounding the June War of 1967. As

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a Nation the United States may not have truly learned all the lessons from the June War, and indeed implemented them in ways that will make the United States Navy more capable and United States Foreign Policy and global strategy more successful.

Mr. David Walsh wrote an article “Friendless Fire” in the June 2003 Edition of the US Naval Institute Proceedings. His case was compelling and accurate, though not complete in some important details. His article forthrightly asserted that the book, “The Liberty Incident: The 1967 Attack on the US Navy Spy Ship”, by a retired Naval Reserve Captain, A Jay Cristol, was seriously flawed. The Boards of directors of the USS Liberty Alliance and the USS LIBERTY Veterans Association completely and utterly agrees with Mr. Walsh’s conclusion. Mr. Walsh then came in for severe criticism, not by any objective standards of scholarship or analytical rigor, let alone substantive fact, but solely because he had challenged the Cristol thesis. At this point an article was written for the Proceedings that both supported Mr. Walsh and also added more background and detail to his main contentions. This article then came under fire, and the Proceedings found itself in the middle of a sort of literary firefight. After some time the

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Proceedings did publish one short, but most important piece, that said very succinctly that the attack upon the LIBERTY was declared deliberate in their memoirs by both Dean Rusk and the CIA Director at the time. This was the last piece that Proceedings would entertain, but it did end that particular debate with a positive for the USS Liberty Alliance since the Cristol lobby had tried to undermine both Mr. Walsh and those in the wider community who had deeper knowledge than was embodied in the Cristol thesis.

The scene needs to be set therefore for what happened in those few short days in June 1967 that encapsulate what is known as “The June War”.

In the mid 1970s the US Navy assembled a very fine team of Cold War specialists. At the unclassified level their work can be read in the book, “Soviet Naval Diplomacy” (Pergamon Press, 1979). Dr. Anthony Wells of the Board of the USS Liberty Alliance was a member of this team and researched and wrote the part dealing with the June 1967 Arab Israeli War. He also wrote a CNA Professional Paper number 204, dated October 1977, entitled, “The 1967 June War. Soviet Naval Diplomacy and the Sixth Fleet – A Reappraisal”. This paper is included in the documents within the Document Center.

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What was the wider context of the Israeli attack upon the LIBERTY? Dr. Wells had full access at the Top Secret and SCI levels and used the latest research tools for the time for the seminal work conducted in 1976-1977. In addition he conducted special and unique interviews with late Secretary of State Dean Rusk and his key advisor Helmut Sonnenfeldt. His initial focus was Soviet. The United States was trying in the mid 1970s to fully understand the Soviets' modus operandi, their strategic goals, and the role that their growing naval power would play in pursuit of their national self interests.

In parallel to this it was realized that a key question was, "What had motivated Israel to perpetrate such an egregious act against the USS LIBERTY"? What were the total circumstances, strategic and operational, that led the Israeli leadership making the fateful decision to attack and destroy a US eavesdropping ship operating in international waters at the end of the June or Six-Day War.? A war that witnessed Israel redefining its boundaries and asserting its military supremacy. The research concluded in 1976-1977, and is still very much valid today, that it was the strategic underpinnings and US-Soviet relations that hold the answer to these questions. What was concluded was that Israel's actions during the Six day

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June War brought US-Soviet relations to a stressful peak not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Was Israel's attack on the LIBERTY an act of blatant and brutal Israeli realpolitik? Let us address this assertion.

To do this it is critical to recap several salient facts. In May 1967 President Nasser of Egypt took several major aggressive acts against Israel at the same time that the Syrian government began to encourage the Palestinians to intensify guerilla operations against Israel (Wells, Soviet Naval Diplomacy, P. 158). On June 5, 1967 Israel launched a stunning preemptive attack. By June 10, when a Cease-Fire was established, Israel had defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank of the Jordan River and had taken the Golan Heights.

Why then attack the USS LIBERTY on June 8? The Soviet Union was a key player, not in the shadows but as a demonstrative protagonist.

The Soviets were supporting the new Syrian regime to the hilt – economic and military aid, while Palestinian guerilla operations from Syrian bases against Israel were intensified. At the same time the Soviets turned up the gain in supporting Nasser in Egypt. In mid May 1967 the Syrians protested

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to the Soviets that the Israelis were going to invade Syria, occupy Damascus and topple the Baathist regime. Dr. Wells provided details of Nasser's further belligerent acts in "Soviet Naval Diplomacy". The Soviets were obstructionist, derailing international peace efforts. At this point the brave men in the LIBERTY were forward deployed. They were at the pointy end of the spear. In one sense, as an eavesdropping ship, they were the point of the spear. What did Washington want? The Administration wanted to be inside the mindset and intentions of all the main players, including Israel. The LIBERTY was on station to help unravel the plans, intentions, and operations of the key players.

One very key point needs to be made at this juncture - Israel's plan could spell disaster for US-Soviet relations – an attack upon Syria, Moscow's client.

Sidesteps need to be made for a moment, and then return to the main theme.

Where was the US Navy while all this was happening? The Soviet Fifth Eskadra, their Sixth Fleet equivalent for want of a better comparison, was qualitatively and quantitatively weak compared with the Sixth Fleet, despite Soviet augmentations via the Turkish Straits. However, the Soviets made

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their moves and created what became known later as standard anticarrier task groups, with the effective shadowing of the AMERICA and SARATOGA Battlegroups. The word tattletale entered the US Navy's lexicon at this time. The Soviets' main thrust was to occur with its ground forces, and in particular its airborne forces. Both the US and the Soviet Union showed constraint at sea, despite incidents in East Asia in the Sea of Japan on May 10 and May 11 1967. From Dr. Wells' work in the 1970s it became very clear exactly how Moscow intended to respond militarily, and 47 years later it still sends a shiver down the spines of Middle East specialists, particularly in light of the conversations that took place between Dr. Wells and the Secretary of State in 1967, Dean Rusk.

Did the Soviet Union plan to intervene and why? The answer is "yes", the "why" is because Israel intended to invade Syria and take Damascus. This single fact is the key. In response the Soviets planned to do two things: provide military resupply to Syria and to intervene directly. The Soviets began operations on June 8, 1967, the day that the LIBERTY was attacked. The Soviet plan was to launch Red Army paratroopers into Syria and place them between an advancing Israeli army and Damascus. AN-12 CUB aircraft, the standard Soviet paratroop and cargo transport, were used, flying

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from fields in Hungary across Yugoslavia and then over the Adriatic and Mediterranean to Syria. The Soviet operational plans and actions were not spontaneous reactions to the Israeli advance. They were well planned in advance, with Yugoslavia granting overflight rights. The Soviets were poised to take on the Israelis. Dr. Wells wrote in 1977, “The threat to intervene was raised again – intensively – when the Syrian forces collapsed as the Israelis stormed the Golan Heights on June 9, a collapse that left the road to Damascus virtually undefended”. The Cold War balance was now becoming dangerously out of kilter. USS LIBERTY was a key source in the NSA network. The Hotline quickly became an extraordinary successful means of preventing a major conflict. Moscow made it clear – if the Israelis did not desist the Red Army would execute a massive airborne drop into Syria and confront the Israeli army.

In March 1977 Dr. Wells interviewed separately Dean Rusk and Helmut Sonnenfeldt. He became privy to unique perspectives and data not previously released. Both men gave their permission to publish their comments. Dean Rusk told Dr. Wells that he and President Johnson “had never assumed any other “that the Soviets would use their airborne forces. Wells wrote the following about Dean Rusk, “his feelings at the time was

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one of despair if the Cease-Fire had not held and the Israelis not halted when they did” (Wells, P. 166, Soviet naval Diplomacy). Wells asked Dean Rusk what the US would have done. He believed that the US would have landed Sixth Fleet aircraft in Israel to deter the Soviets from invading Israel. Dean Rusk believed the latter highly likely once the Soviet Airborne Forces had overwhelmed the Israelis. They would retake the Golan Heights and march into Israel itself, a total disaster. President Johnson demanded that the Israelis end their advance into Syria, while he sent the two Sixth Fleet carrier Battlegroups nearer to the Syrian coast. The Israeli-Syrian Cease-Fire came not a moment too soon. As the Duke of Wellington said after the Battle of Waterloo, “ It was a very close run thing”.

The USS LIBERTY was in the middle of knowing more than the Israelis would tolerate. In the heat of battle and crisis nations can make disastrous mistakes. The Israelis made such an unconscionable and monumental error of judgement, quite deliberate and well planned. Moreover their advance into Syria bought superpower confrontation dangerously close. The timing of the LIBERTY attack was such that Washington knew that the Soviet Union was not responsible. Mr. Walsh was praised in many quarters for revealing the glaring errors in the Cristol thesis.

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What were the dynamics of communications during this critical period?

What may LIBERTY have been listening to? In terms of the classified details it is hoped that the US government under the 50 year rule will release some or all of the material in 2018, though the Liberty Alliance Board suspects that the US may follow the British model with some material and wait in excess of 50 years because of sources and methods issues, locations of sensitive facilities, and other related highly classified operational intelligence aspects that are still relevant more than 50 years later. NSA and GCHQ technical tradecraft remains in place in spite of the vast changes in computational mathematics, cryptography and other related sciences and computer hardware and software. The UK was a serious player in 1967, and still is, because of the special relationship and sharing of intelligence, particularly communications intelligence. What the UK eventually releases will be revealing, but hold your breath, we may have to wait a long time. The British are still releasing World War Two classified information. It is important to remember one simple observation: The US and British were interested in everyone's communications: Soviet, Israeli, Syrian, Jordanian, Egyptian, and all their communications with their allies and

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friends, and in particular the operations of their intelligence services. We could learn a lot from Soviet communications, as much if not more than from Israeli communications. It is like one great game of hearsay. Any new book that is being researched and written regarding LIBERTY should include an extensive visit to the Moscow archives in an attempt to get into the Soviet Communications intelligence archives, as well as those of the KGB and the GRU. In addition, the non Soviet Warsaw Pact intelligence agencies' archives are invaluable sources since they will include material that the Russians may not release. There are fluent Russian speakers who may volunteer their time to help unravel the material.

What does the USS Liberty Alliance Board and the USS LIBERTY Veterans Association Board think about the specifics of the Israeli attack? Like Dean Rusk and CIA director Richard Helms the Boards of both organizations have no doubts whatsoever that the Israelis wanted LIBERTY sunk without trace and with no survivors, no one to tell what had happened and by whom. The attack was conducted in such a way to minimize communications from LIBERTY. Dr. Wells concluded that Israel wanted the identity of the attackers to be associated elsewhere, possibly with Egypt. LIBERTY's

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destruction ensured that she could no longer collect vital intelligence, while potentially garnering US support through a false belief that one of the Arab world countries had been responsible. Perhaps it might even push the US over the edge, or at least leave it totally neutral internationally about Israel's invasion of Syria, and possible entry into the outskirts of Damascus, while privately supporting Israel. However, a retaliatory strike by the US against, for example, Egyptian airfields would have precipitated the very crisis that Secretary of State Dean Rusk sought to avert. If the Israelis had continued into Syria and the United States had attacked Egyptian airfields, we can only speculate on the consequences for Soviet actions. The Israelis could have dragged the US into a war without the US really knowing why. Israel appears to have had no concern for the consequences of its actions for US-Soviet relations, as long as Israel's security objectives were achieved. These objectives would be achieved by any means and at any cost. This summarizes the philosophy behind Israel's planning and execution of the Six Day War. LIBERTY's survival denied Israel the ability to exploit its loss, and thus compelled President Johnson to urge constraint on Israel's advances, together with intense pressure from Moscow.

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The brave crew of the LIBERTY ensured that the ship survived. They fought their ship with all means at their disposal. This fact of courage and survival is the enduring hallmark and legacy of the USS LIBERTY. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, They did not give up and they did not surrender.

Admiral Merlin Staring has written an incredibly erudite and accurate Statement that was presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee and to the Secretary of Defense. This new document is a piece of unsullied Gold within the Document Center material. It is vital for the record and for ensuring that later generations understand what happened, and that indeed LIBERTY's crew were victims of egregious war crimes. Publication of Admiral Merlin's Statement is critical. As the JAG who investigated in 1967, and as the subsequent Chief Naval Judge Advocate when Senator John Warner of Virginia was Secretary of the Navy, Merlin Staring's Statement has enormous credibility and will hold extraordinary respect with any open minded researcher and historian.

The contents of the Document Center contain unvarnished and independent material. This unique collection seeks to avoid any form of sensationalism. For examples of the latter, pursuing what the CIA wild card James Jesus

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Angleton got up to, and what US submarines were doing are factors, but they will not change very much, just send the public down wild, sensationalized goose chases.

In the current context of Middle East politics and US policy the long term resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis depends on the US being a true honest broker and working with the international community in reducing the current boundaries to something near to the pre 1967 June War boundaries, while making some boundary concessions to Israel in order to guarantee its long term security and survivability. The USS Liberty Alliance and USS LIBERTY Veterans Association Document Center provide a distinguished and independent source of material to analyze the nature and context of critical policy issues for the United States.

The brave men of the LIBERTY, by fighting their ship and not giving up, helped save the United States from a potentially disastrous embroilment with the Soviet Union over Israel. Therefore, the USS Liberty Alliance Board and the USS LIBERTY Veterans Association, in memory of the brave crew and distinguished advocates such as Admiral Thomas Moorer, recommend that

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the US Navy should always have a major Fleet unit Named LIBERTY,
permanently commemorating the heroism of LIBERTY's brave crew.

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